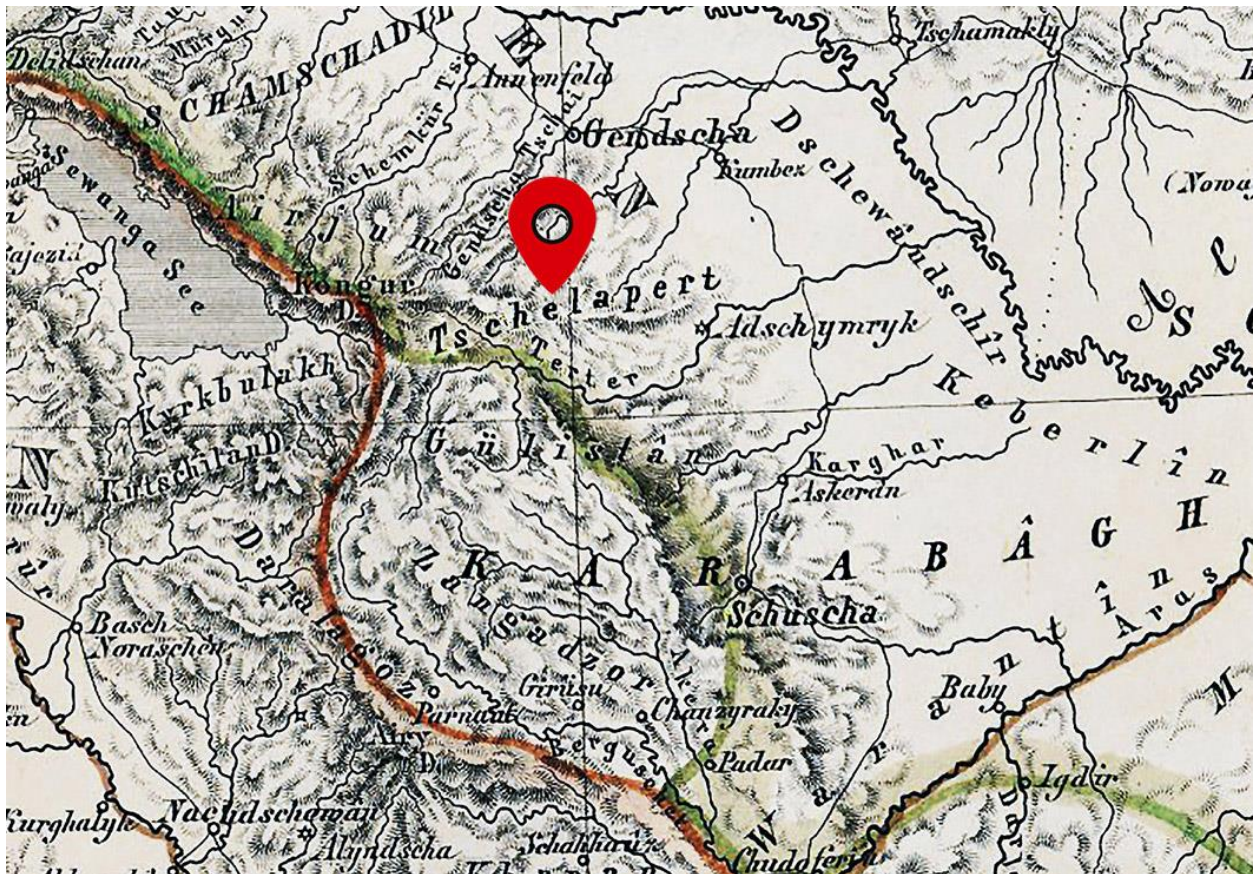




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LEGALIZATION OF CAUCASIAN CARPETS WITH FAKES INSCRIPTIONS

using the example of a Karabakh carpet from the early 20th century
from the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

The original Karabakh Chelabert carpet (Eagle Kazak, Sunburst) from the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was woven at the beginning of the 20th century in Karabakh (Azerbaijan). Commercial sizes of the carpet, design, dyes, type and density of the carpet knots completely coincide with similar carpets available in both Azerbaijani, European, American museum and private collections.

At the beginning of the century, the Russian Imperial "Handicraft Committee" was engaged in the production and sale of such carpets to the European and American markets. In the creative workshops of the Handicraft Committee (Tiflis), the design of the old Karabakh carpet "Chelebi" of the Safavid era was reworked, simplified and reduced. The name of the carpet "CHELEBI" in the Safavid era was used to mean "Divine". Actually, the term "Chelebi" means spiritual rank, holiness.

Several Safavid "Chelebi" carpets and similar carpets of the 18th century are today kept in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art (Istanbul), Victoria and Albert Museum, Thyssen Bornemisza collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Roman Zalessky collection and etc.). In the European classification, old "Chelebi" carpets are known as "Dragon carpets", "Early Karabakh Carpets", "Blossom Carpets".

After the collapse of the Safavid State, during the period of the Karabakh Khanate, carpets with the “Chelebi” design continued to be woven in the historical Chelabert region of Karabakh. The region of Chelabert was part of the Melikdoms of Karabakh “Khamisa” confederation. “Khamisa” Melikdoms were a union of five administrative-territorial regions of Karabakh, ruled by vassals (melik) of the Karabakh Khan. The vassal title "melik" in Azerbaijani language means "overlord/prince".

Handicraft Committee exported carpets with the updated “Chelebi” design to the international market. Carpets intended for export were woven from high-quality wool by professional weavers, first in a workshop in the city of Shusha, and then in the Chelabert villages of Tug and Terter. The new carpets received a new trade name “Chelabert”, with which they were sent to Europe and America.

Commercialization of carpet production by the Handicraft Committee led to the weaving of “Chelabert” carpets in several standard sizes. Depending on the required size, the carpet medallion was simply repeated along the vertical axis. The size of the carpets was determined by their price. To meet a certain price standard, it was sometimes necessary to weave only half of the medallion when the carpet reached the desired size.

The smallest size of carpets in this series had one medallion, slightly larger ones - 1.5 medallions, 2 medallions, 2.5 medallions, 3 and 4 medallions. The average size of carpets in this series is 145 X 225 cm. All carpets were woven exclusively in carpet workshops under the strict supervision of a senior master, and the introduction of any inscriptions into these commercial carpets was excluded.

The medallion and colors of the carpets, design of the border strip of the carpets of this series were unified. There were partial fillings of carpet voids with small traditional motifs that did not affect the overall design of the carpet.

Several carpets from this series were sent to the American market. One of them was purchased by speculators and resellers. For the purpose of profitable resale, the Armenian inscription “Ter Mikael Saribekov” (proper name) and the date: 1850 were added to the carpet.

With this inscription, the carpet was purchased by the collector Robert A. Fisher, who subsequently donated his entire collection of carpets to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.”

But the carpet did not have a serious provenance confirming its date and Armenian origin. Carpet was unknown to collectors and the general public. To solve this problem, the “Armenian Rugs Society” organized an exhibition of this carpet at the Textile Museum in 1980 and paid for the publication of the catalog. After 4 years, “Armenian Rugs Society” organizes a demonstration of this carpet at an exhibition of Armenian carpets at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, October 6 - December 30, 1984. “Alex and Marie Monogian Foundation” (Detroit, Michigan), which promotes Armenian culture in the USA, sponsored publication of the Catalog this exhibition. Authors of the Catalog “Weavers, Merchants and Kings. The Inscribed Rugs of Armenia” (1984) Lucy Der Manuelian and Murray L. Eiland.

In 1985, Dennis R. Dodds placed a photograph and description of this carpet in the catalog “Oriental Rugs: The Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert A. Fisher in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts”.

Thus, the serial carpet, which was woven not by a village weaver in the village, but by a professional weaver of the carpet workshop of the Handicraft Committee, received a provenance that legalized its fake inscription and date.

The method described above is one of the typical methods for legalizing Caucasian carpets with falsified inscriptions and dates. As practice shows, most of these operations are sponsored and promoted by the “Armenian Rugs Society” and small traders. In their opinion, a carpet with an inscription and a date included in it acquires a higher commodity and collectible status. Such fake carpets are found in almost all major museums and private collections. By the way, fake dates are quite common among Arabic inscriptions on Caucasian carpets.

Those who love Caucasian carpets and not politics and the criminal carpet business know very well the origin, typology and approximate date of creation of the carpets, without any inscription. Authentic inscriptions on Caucasian carpets are often found, but none of them so rudely and unceremoniously disfigures the carpet.

There are examples when the inscription is very large and ostentatiously woven into an authentic carpet. But even in such carpets the inscription was not placed rudely and accidentally. The presence of an inscription in such signature carpets was deliberate and had informational value. But even so, the inscription did not discredit the design and artistic value of the carpet. The inscription on the commercial carpet from the collection of Robert A. Fisher in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond was added later, unprofessionally and rudely “squeezed” into the “voids” of the carpet design.

The critical difference between the level of professionalism of an authentic carpet weaver and an inscription weaver does not escape attention. One and the same carpet weaver could not so perfectly weave the complex curvilinear and graceful motifs of the carpet and at the same time, so unprofessionally weave the inscription... They were woven by different weavers, at different times.

The date 1850 on the carpet is also surprising. It must be said that from the end of the 17th century to the mid-18th century, old Chelebi carpets were woven in large (Safavid) sizes. During the period of the Khanates of Azerbaijan and until the beginning of the activities of the Handicraft Committee (1899-1914), carpets became somewhat smaller and simplified. Carpets from the period of the Handicraft Committee decreased in size even more and the medallion became a large, main motif of the carpet.

The dimensions of the carpet with the Armenian inscription from the Fisher collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond are too small (148x210 cm) and the decor of the carpet is extremely laconic for carpets from 1850. Its size and laconic design fully comply with the standards of serial carpets of the Handicraft Committee.

In the 60s of the 20th Century in European and American catalogs this carpet was called “Chelabird” (7. Plate22,23), “Kasak”/“Kasak Eagle”/“Adler Kasak”/“Kazak”/“. In the 70s, the name “Chelabird” was changed to “Chelaberd” and at the same time the new English name “Sunburst” was gaining popularity.

Since the 80s, the idea that the design of the Karabakh “Chelabert” carpet is of Armenian origin has been circulating in carpet discussions. In the Armenian version of the name, the last letter of the word Chelabert is replaced by the letter “d” - Chelaberd. The slightly and imperceptibly changed name was no longer associated with the toponym where these carpets were traditionally woven, but with the Armenian phrase “**Chela berd**”, meaning “Water fortress/Fortress on the water”. It must be said that there has never been a “Fortress on the Water” anywhere in Karabakh. The “Armenian Rugs Society” played an exceptional role in the dissemination of this changed name.

In Soviet times, on the initiative of the company "ZAKGOSTORG" ("Transcaucasian State Trade") in Azerbaijan Karabakh they again began to weave this design from a sample of the Handicraft Committee carpet.

Carpets were woven in the village of Chelebi near the city of Barda and in another village of Chelebi in the Jebail region. Carpets coming from these villages to the domestic market brought the famous design back to its old name "Chelebi".

With the start of mass production of these carpets in the workshops of "AzerKhalcha" ("AzeriCarpet") and their sale on the Soviet market, the name "Chelebi" was finally established for them.

In the case of the carpet from the collection of Robert A. Fisher (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts), speculators unfamiliar with the history of Caucasian carpet production tried to "age" the already old Karabakh carpet even more. The inscription, roughly "crossing out" the carpet, turned the traditional carpet into a poster that should prove something to everyone...

As a result of such a rude and deliberate invasion of an authentic carpet, not only the carpet itself lost, but also all those who simply, without any politics or fake dates, love authentic Caucasian carpets.

And Jesus said:

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

Luke 12: 1

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fragment of a shaped carpet woven for the Shrine of Shah Ne'matullah Vali in Mahan, Iran, 1066—1067 AH (1656—57 CE). National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Early Karabagh Dragon rug. Published: Oriental Rug Co. Newsletter, Berkeley, Vol. IV, No. 1, Jan. 1975. Fig. 8.



"Chelebi" (Sunburst), 17th century. Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art



Karabakh, "Chelebi" (Sunburst). Early 18th century, Safavid Period.
Formerly Wher Collection



Karabakh, "Chelebi" (Sunburst). Azerbaijani Khanates Period (XVIIIth century).
Private collection. Schloss Ehningen, Baden-Württemberg



Chelabert, Karabakh, Barda, Azerbaijan. Mid. XIXth century.
Victoria_and_Albert_Museum

23 K A R A B A G H - Tschelabird

Größe: 135 x 188

Im rotgrundigen Mittelfeld große Mittelrosette, wie sie für Adler-Kassaks typisch ist. Oben und unten halbierte Rosette, umgeben von großen Lanzettblättern. Borte wie bei Teppich Nr. 22.



Kette	W · S-Drehung, 3fach · gewirnt ungefärbt, weiß
Schuß	W · S-Drehung, 2fach · gewirnt gefärbt, dunkelbraun
Flor	2 Schüsse · 1. gerade; 2. gewellt W · Z-Drehung, 2fach · ungezwirnt Knoten III · H 32 · B 26 · qdm 830
Oberkante	
Unterkante	keine Originalbefestigung
Seiten	



Karabakh Rug, Sunburst (Chelaberd) design. XIXth century. Virginia Museum.
Armenian inscription: Ter Mikael Saribekov 1850



Sunburst (Chelabert), Karabakh. Early XXth century.
Canada, Calgary University Gallery



Sunburst (Chelabert), Karabakh. Early XXth century. Sotheby's sale (2005)



Chelabert (Sunburst), Karabakh. Early XXth century. Louvre Museum



Eagle Kazak (Chelabert Karabakh) Early XXth century. Private collection



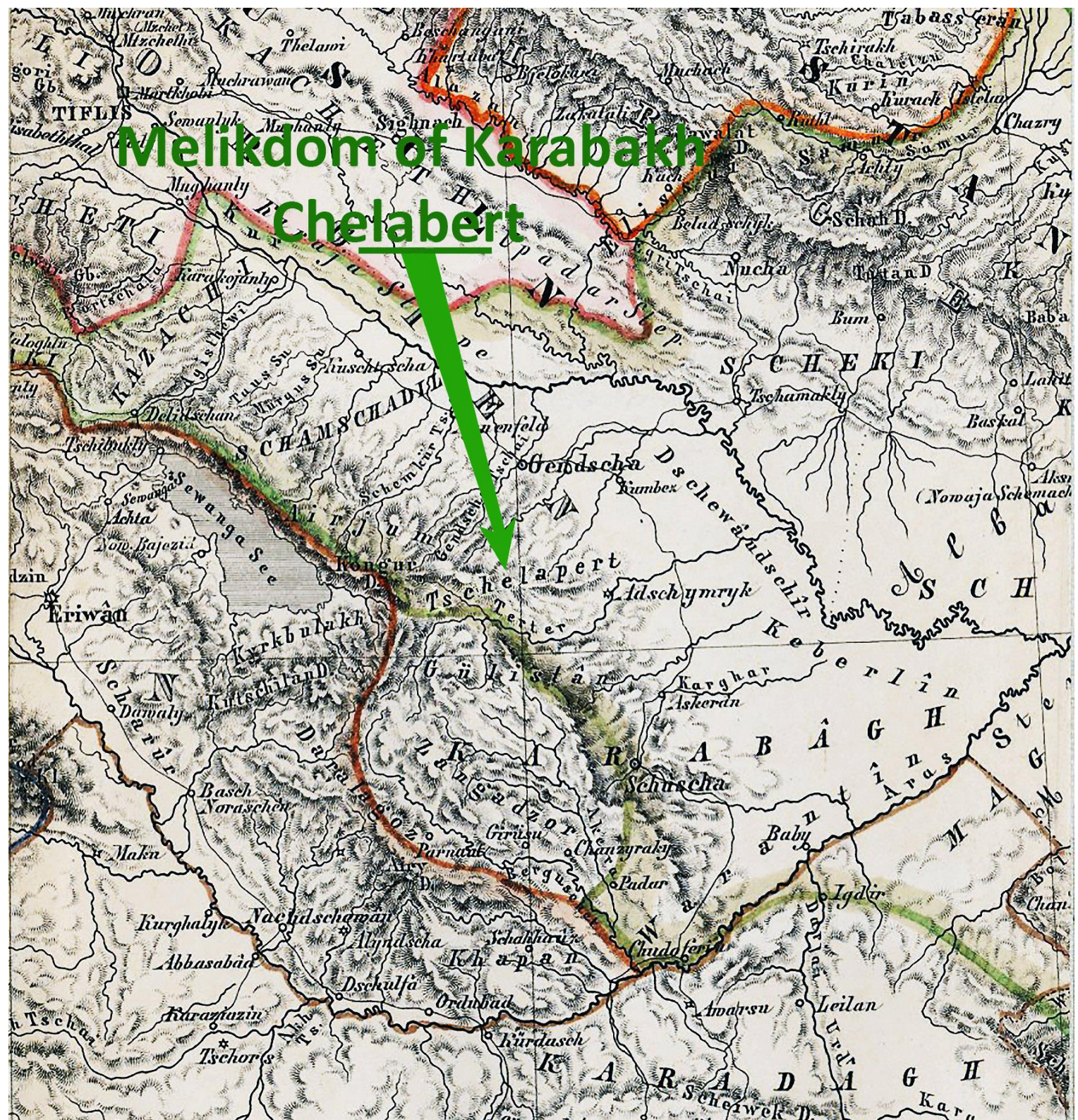
Chelabert (Sunburst), Karabakh. Early XXth century.
Azerbaijani Carpet Museum



Chelabert (Sunburst), Karabakh. Early XXth century.
Azerbaijani Carpet Museum



Chelabert (Sunburst), Karabakh. Early XXth century.
Claremont Rug Company



Map: South Caucasus, 1856. Melikdom of Karabakh - Chelabert
written by a foreign traveler and cartographer in the form of **Tschelapert**